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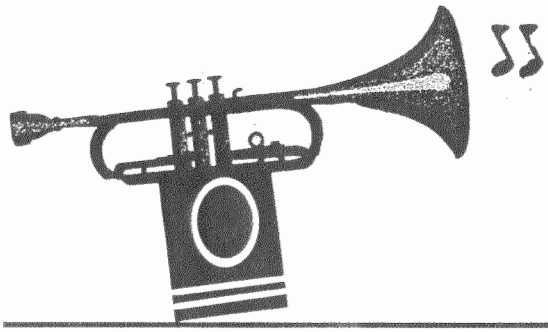
UPDATE

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND & FIVE POINTS ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT NEWSLETTER



Official Opening of the Liaison Office of the African Burial Ground & Foley Square Archaeological Project

May 20, and 22, 1993 mark the official opening of the public education office of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Project. Headed by urban anthropologist, Dr. Sherrill D. Wilson, this office was established in March of 1993 to meet the increasing interests and requests for updated information and education in the form of public presentations and written materials on the early history of Africans in New York. The need and interest for historical information on early African history in New York City arose from the present excavation of nearly 400 human remains from the city's earliest and largest known African burial place for free and enslaved Africans. It is estimated that these excavations are only a small portion of a 5 1/2 to 6 acre burying place located in the vicinity of City Hall, for Africans during the 18th century. It is further estimated that in total, more than 10,000 people of African origin were interred here.

To meet the general goals of educating the public on the lives and neglected histories of the populations of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Community, the Liaison Office currently offers a variety of no-cost educational programs including:

*Public educator's program, where a team of trained educators visit schools and other interested groups providing slide-presentations on both sites and their histories and the archaeological findings of the research

*Archaeological tours of the Foley Square Laboratory are available by appointment.

*A quarterly newsletter to provide on-going information on the status of the project sites, the current research findings and plans for memorialization, etc.

*Education materials are also being developed for all age groups.

*Office video and slide-presentations on the projects and histories in early New York.

The Liaison Office will begin its regular schedule on Tuesday, May 25, 1993 and receive visitors every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. These programs are appropriate for children in the third grade thru college level and adults. For information call: 212-432-5707.

To celebrate the opening the team specialists will provide slide presentations and talks on the project goals and findings. The specialists will include, Dr. Michael Blakey, the Scientific Director of the African Burial Ground Project, Historian, Dr. Thelma Foote, Archaeologists, Michael Parrington, and Dr. Rebecca Yamin, Conservator, Gary McGowan, and Laboratory Director, Linda Stone and guest speakers.

All programs are sponsored by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA).

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PROJECT CHRONOLOGY/KEY EVENTS

March 15, 1989	Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) executed between the General Services Administration (GSA), Advisory Council on Historic Preservation (ACHP), and the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC).
May 1990	Stage 1A Cultural Resource Survey of Foley Square submitted by Historic Conservation and Interpretation Inc. (HCI)
January 1991	Archaeological Soil Boring Survey of the Foley Square Project submitted by HCI.
May 1991	Archaeological fieldwork commenced. Human remains identified in Republican Alley.
September 1991	Excavation of human remains commenced by HCI and the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team (MFAT).
October 8, 1991	Press conference was held on site. Descendant (African American) community expressed outrage that it was uninvolved in decisions.
December 5, 1991	New York Times reports GSA's proposed use of "coroner's method" to excavate human remains.
December 9, 1991	Senator David A. Paterson established the Task Force for the oversight of the African Burial Ground. Descendant community sought involvement of African American anthropologists.
December 20, 1991	Amended Memorandum of Agreement executed.
February 14, 1992	Burials disturbed by construction workers.
March 1992	HCI draft research design submitted.
April 1992	City Council hearings and town meetings are held on the project. Mayor David A. Dinkins established Advisory Committee on the project.
June 1992	ACHP recommended extensive revisions to the HCI research design. Howard University based researchers submit alternative research design.

July 1, 1992	John Milner Associates, Inc. (JMA) assumed administration of the project.
July 27, 1992	Congressional field hearing on site held following Mayor's demand that excavation cease because of MOA violation. Congressional hearing headed by former Congressman Gus Savage who calls for a halt to excavation.
July 29, 1992	Excavation on site halted by GSA.
August 1992	Descendant community identifies deficiencies in skeletal conservation. Community meeting at GSA recommended Howard University assume oversight of project.
September 28, 1992	Excavation of eleven burials left partially unexcavated on July 29, 1992 resumed.
September 1992	Foley Square archaeological laboratory established at 6 World Trade Center.
September 1992	Field records and artifacts held by HCI in New Jersey transferred to the Foley Square laboratory.
October 1, 1992	African American anthropologists contracted as project directors in collaboration with JMA.
October 9, 1992	Excavation of partial completed burials finished and site closed down.
October 15, 1992	Howard University/JMA draft research design submitted.
October 1992	National Steering Committee for the African Burial Ground formed.
December 22, 1992	National Steering Committee recommends timely relocation of human remains to Howard University.
January 15, 1993	Closing date for comments on Howard University JMA draft research design.
March 1, 1993.	African Burial Ground/Five Points Archaeological Project Liaison Office established.
April 22. 1993	Revised research design on the African Burial Ground (Broadway Block) submitted by Howard University/JMA. Revised research design on the Five Points district (Courthouse Block) submitted by JMA/Howard University.
May 20, 22, 1993	"Official opening" of the Liaison office.

INSIDE THE LAB...PUTTING IT ALL BACK TOGETHER

By Rodger Taylor

Down in the basement of the World Trade Center on the B1 level, not far from the detonation point of the now famous World Trade Center bomb, is the Foley Square Lab. It's a big room with fluorescent lighting, two computers, thick off white concrete walls and rows of desks and tables. Most of the lab technicians sit in front of huge metal trays filled with tiny sherds or pieces of glass, metal, ceramics, etc. Others shift through mounds of shells from clams and other crustaceans or animal bone.

The Foley Square Archaeological Project is the rediscovery, excavation and analysis of a 14,000 square foot portion of the African Burial Ground off Broadway between Duane and Reade Streets called the Broadway Block, which also includes other historic deposits where the bulk of the artifacts came from; and a separate excavation a few blocks away off Pearl Street, at what used to be Five Points," and the Collect Pond. This site is called the Courthouse Block. A tremendous amount of cultural material was recovered from both areas. Cultural material includes all objects that are made and used by people in their daily lives. The Foley Square Lab, located in the U.S. Customs House at 6 World Trade Center is where much of the processing, curation and analytic work is being done.

"Most projects aren't this big," Rebecca Yamin, the Principal Investigator for the non-burial features in the Broadway and Courthouse Block, says. "One of the challenges of the lab is controlling this immense amount of material." One of the ways scientists measure cultural material is by the number of artifacts found. An artifact is an object made or modified by humans. The exact number of artifacts in the Foley Square Lab is not yet known. However, there are about 500 boxes of material from the Courthouse site, 250 from the Broadway site, plus 300 boxes of soil and floatation samples and approximately 550 artifacts from the burials themselves.

The crew is presently washing, cleaning and labeling artifacts from the Broadway Block. "Because of the importance of the African Burial Ground, we started working on the material from the Broadway Block first," says Lab Director Linda Stone. "We've washed about 30% of the Broadway artifacts thus far. Right now we're at the most tedious, yet most important stage," says Assistant Lab Director Joanne Saker. "The work has to be done precisely or the collection could get contaminated (mixed up). Once we get the artifacts cleaned and labeled, then they're safe."

Provenience is an important concept in archaeology. In the field each artifact found was bagged, labeled and followed every step of the way. In the laboratory they are logged and tracked by computer and by hand. The information that indicates exactly where on the site each artifact was found is called "provenience". It is what much of the analysis is based on. "At the stage we're at now we're starting to look at things; to get to see the volume of things and the types of materials," Joanne adds.

Lee Weber, who's been working on the project since May 1991 when the Courthouse excavation began, is labeling artifacts. "We start out with these index cards which give the provenience information and tell us what should be on the tray," she says. Lee is then responsible for labeling each artifact on the tray. First she applies a base coat on the artifact using B72, an acrylic resin. When it drys, with a rapidograph pen she writes the site and catalog number on the acrylic base using black ink for light pieces and white ink for dark pieces. She then coats it again. B72 is used because it's removable and does not damage the artifact.

When Lee is finished labeling, each type of item, i.e., glass, ceramics, etc. gets its own bag. Because one of the objectives is to reassemble as much of this material as possible, like pieces are kept together. The metal objects which are all rusty and corroded get bagged but don't get marked.

At another desk, Chris Campbell, who cleans and stabilizes faunal or animal bone, is working on the jaw of a large cow. It's taking time because the cow's bones are in horrible condition. As Chris takes the dirt off, he applies a B72 solution any place where the bone is cracked or broken open. How the cow ended up in the African Burial Ground is an open question. Was it associated with a nearby tannery or butcher shop? When asked about it Chris, who's African American, is incredulous. "It seems amazing that people built houses and buried cows in an area that used to be a cemetery."

"The fact that some of the remains of tanning and all of the remains of the ceramics industry appear to have been deposited on the site at the same time that the land was being used as a burial ground suggests, not surprisingly, that the Africans using the burial ground did not have exclusive rights to the space." (Research Design, April 1993:30).

Larry Jepson is the resident computer geek. "As long as sufficient data has been entered into it," he says, "the computer can sort and analyze data quickly and accurately." In the upcoming months through graphs, charts and CAD illustrations, Larry will help paint detailed pictures of the Burial Ground that will give us more insights about the people who were buried there. He will also manipulate data regarding the thousands of artifacts recovered on the Courthouse Block.

Towards the back of the room are two desks, a bunch of small bottles filled with chemicals, microscopes and other technical instruments. This is where conservators Gary McGowan and Cheryl LaRoche work. "Normally conservators work in the basements of museums," LaRoche says. "We're not used to such high profile positions." Both Gary and Cheryl have been in great demand as speakers at the many seminars and forums that have been held over the past year on the African Burial Ground.

Conservators stabilize and halt the deterioration of material. It is a rather new phenomenon for them to be working so closely with archaeologists. "There's more and more of it these days and there should be," says McGowan. "Much of the general public and even colleagues in other disciplines don't realize how broad our profession is. Conservators verify age, authenticity, stabilize, analyze and treat many different types of artifacts. We're trained in the material science." Material science is the study of the physical and chemical characteristics of a given object. For example, bone reacts like bone; copper alloy like copper alloy.

Through the doors, past the conservator's work place is an even larger room with rows of shelves full of boxes. This is where the artifacts are stored. Off in a corner Al Drost is creating a map. "In the field, a map was made that indicated where all the burials were," he says. "The map I'm working on will document all non-burial features and other areas of excavation. When I'm finished we'll hopefully be able to pinpoint exactly where each artifact came from."

Aside from the profound and earthshaking discovery of the African Burial Ground, the vast array of artifacts and what this cultural material can tell us about the lives of people in early New York is one of the most exciting aspects of the Project. Compared to the few 19th century African American graveyards that have been excavated, not much in terms of personal effects were found. Nevertheless there are over 500 burial artifacts. Things like sherds of plates and other ceramic pieces, cowrie shells, a thimble, a few tombstones or grave markers and beads were found.

One woman had a musketball imbedded in her rib cage. There were three wooden coffin lids discovered. One had a heart shaped design. Another the initials E.W. and possibly the indication of the year 1738.

Until the mid 19th century most people were not buried in their clothes but were wrapped in sheets called shrouds. These shrouds were usually held together by pins at the head and feet. During the excavation many of these shroud pins were recovered.

Among some of the more interesting small items being curated from the Broadway Block are bone button backs, the fronts of which were most likely covered with cloth. Several copper rings were recovered from the African Burial Ground. There was a shoe hook which was used to lace the high boots people often wore. A copper alloy clock hand was found, as were a few coins (any dates have worn away). There is a brass door plate and a lovely almost modern looking pair of cufflinks. A few small items and some organic material has not been identified. These materials will be sent out for analysis to determine structural and chemical makeup.

Perhaps the most spectacular burial was a woman who was found wearing a girdle or belt of beads. It is very likely that she and the 110 beads she was wearing came directly from Africa. The research regarding the beads is ongoing. In the next issue of the newsletter, an update will be provided by Cheryl LaRoche.

"The singularity of this site and its importance to the history of the potters craft in New York and the entire Northeast cannot be over emphasized." (Research Design, April 1993:30).

Some of the styles of pottery being discovered in the lab haven't been seen before in New York. Two of the early and most famous potters, Crolius and Remmy, ran their business on the northern edge of the Burial Ground. The Crolius family started manufacturing pottery in 1735, possibly earlier. Apparently, most of the ceramics they dumped in the grave site were what is called "Wasters." A lot could go wrong in the manufacturing process, wasters are pieces that didn't come out right. "I would venture to say that nobody has a large collection of Crolius and Remmy from this early period," says Joanne Saker. It is believed that Crolius and Remy had enslaved Africans working for them. An issue to be explored is whether any of the styles and motifs on the pottery are African influenced.

Some other fascinating artifacts include: What appears to be a pitcher with an English 18th century political satirical cartoon transfer printed on it, hundreds of disposable white clay smoking pipes, bone handle folding knives, bone handle kitchen utensils, gun flints and a possible biface, which is a serrated tool Native Americans used to scrape animal hides.

The Foley Square Archaeological Project is in a relatively early stage. In the lab there is a growing collection of faunal bones. This is necessary so that as bones are discovered they can be compared to known animals. A library is also being assembled. "From this analysis we're going to learn about a segment of the New York population we know very little about," says Linda Stone. "The discovery of the African Burial Ground has already raised the city's collective consciousness, not only about slavery and African American history, but about our understanding of the history of New York. We have a tremendous responsibility to inform, educate and keep the community abreast of the latest developments regarding this project. The lab is open to the public.
Tours of the lab can be scheduled through the Liaison Office."